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Connecting Communities Protecting the Planet

An Environmental Act of Peace in Conflict-Torn Ukraine

By Heidi Weiskel and Alla Voytsihovska

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In the zone

What happens when nearly half of the 115 registered coal mines operating in a country are suddenly surrounded by tanks, soldiers, and artillery fire? Two things: They stop operating and their operators leave. Both have significant consequences for the environment in eastern Ukraine.



Open-pit coal mines are kept dry during operation. If they are abandoned and not closed down properly, the pits begin to fill with groundwater and rainwater. This water can become dangerously acidic and release toxic metals into the environment. This water may also lead to the walls of abandoned mines collapsing, which can release tons of toxic mining sediment into waterways. Eastern Ukraine is dotted with 1,260 piles of mining overburden rock, which can leach acid drainage into groundwater.

When mine operators in Ukraine's war zone are pushed out of legally operating mines, they turn to unauthorized mines. Illegal mines lack environmental and human safety regulations for workers who are forced to withstand extreme heat and descend up to one mile below the earth's surface.

Ukraine's current political and military crisis is taking a huge human toll. It is also wreaking havoc on the environment.

Before the military conflict

The environment in eastern Ukraine was suffering long before the recent outbreak of hostilities. Donetsk and Luhansk, the industrial heart of Ukraine, are plagued by air and water pollution from iron and steel works in Mariupol, Yenakiieve, Makiivka, Avdeevki, coupled with many coke plant operations and 200 years of coal mining. Mineralized mine water and more than one million tons of salt have been dumped into the region's waterways. The Kalmius Krynka, Bakhmut and Kalchik Rivers are highly contaminated and many water treatment plants are obsolete.

Assessing the environmental impacts of military conflict

Artillery shelling in eastern Ukraine has resulted in fires at coke plants in Avdeyevka and Yasinovskogo, an oil refinery in Lisichansk, a chemical plant in Stirol, and up to 22 electricity substations in Tochmash and beyond. Environment-People-Law (EPL) has documented these fires and how they have incapacitated the electricity grid, volatilized extremely dangerous chemicals, jeopardized both fertile farming land and protected species, and destroyed forests. The conflict has resulted in the discharge of untreated industrial and domestic wastewater, damaged drinking water systems, destroyed highways, and interrupted collection and removal of solid waste. It has forced thousands of refugees to leave their homes.

"The gravity of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine has compelled ELAW and EPL to work together to document and publicize the region's environmental and human rights violations with an aim to restoring the environment and protecting the health of vulnerable communities and species." Heidi Weiskel

The way forward

Ukraine needs help from the international community to restore its environment and natural resources. A first step is to inventory the damage done, both to infrastructure and to the natural environment, including birds, freshwater fish, and animals that once



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An Environmental Act (CONTINUED)

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The Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW) helps communities speak out for clean air, clean water, and a healthy planet. We are a global alliance of attorneys, scientists and other advocates collaborating across borders to promote grassroots efforts to build a sustainable, just future.

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migrated through the area. Once that assessment has been completed, the peaceful work of environmental rehabilitation can begin.

The military conflict is taking its toll on the environment, but conservation measures, increased efficiency, and better environmental safeguards can help Ukraine reclaim its ecosystems and natural beauty while achieving social justice for vulnerable communities.

The public water supply can be reconnected with pipes that do not leak, projects can be subjected to appropriate environmental oversight, and migration corridors can be set aside for internationally protected species, such as the Eastern Imperial Eagle.

It is the right of Ukrainians, and citizens of all countries, to live in a healthy environment with fresh water, clean air, abundant food, open green spaces, and diverse species.

EPL and ELAW look forward to working together to help Ukraine move beyond the crisis.

Heidi Weiskel, PhD, is Staff Scientist at the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide. Professor Alla Voytsihovska is Staff Scientist at Environment-People-Law's Lviv, Ukraine, office. Heidi and Alla met in September 2014 at EPL's international symposium: "Human Rights and the Environment in a New Ukraine."



New ELAW Publications



Holding Corporations Accountable for Damaging the Climate
Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide 2014



PRIMERA PARTE:
Información general sobre la minería metálica

El aprovechamiento de los recursos mineros metálicos en general consiste en encontrar, extraer y transformar los minerales con el fin de obtener metales valiosos para su uso industrial y comercial. Se dice que los minerales, en general, son recursos no renovables porque su cantidad es limitada y sólo pueden extraerse hasta que se agoten.

EXPLORACIÓN
Diversos tipos de ingenieros de las empresas realizan inspecciones y estudios de campo, perforaciones y otros trabajos para determinar el tipo, características, extensión, el volumen de las reservas de minerales y su valor. Para ello con frecuencia se necesita destruir (o cortar) la vegetación, contaminar áreas grandes de trabajadores, equipos y materiales puedan quedarse temporalmente.



A new ELAW report concludes that courts in several countries are poised to pursue climate justice. "Some people are profiting enormously from damaging the climate, while others will bear the costs of that climate damage," says Jennifer Gleason, ELAW Staff Attorney. Jen led a research team of ELAW partners from the United States, India, Ecuador, Brazil, Mexico, and Kenya to identify jurisdictions around the world where strong cases could be filed to hold corporations accountable for damaging the climate. Many thanks to the Wallace Global Fund for making this research possible. Find the report on ELAW's website.

Mining companies have set their sights on Ecuador, where mining threatens communities and ecosystems. ELAW Staff Scientist Meche Lu and former ECOLEX Staff Attorney Gabriela Leon published a handbook to help citizens understand the impacts of mining operations and how communities can make their voices heard: **Environmental and Social Impacts of Open Pit Metal Mining and Ecuador's Regulatory Framework**. Many thanks to the Swift Foundation for making this work possible. Find the handbook on ELAW's website.